

THE
DIFFICULTIES
AND
DISCOURAGEMENTS

Which attend the
Study of the Scriptures
In the Way of
Private Judgment.

In order to show,
That, since such a *Study of the Scriptures*
is Mens indispensable Duty, it concerns
all Christian Societies to remove (as
much as possible) those *Discouragements*.

In a Letter to a Young Clergyman.

By a Presbyter of the Church of England.

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The Difficulties and Discouragements which attend the *Study of the Scriptures in the Way of Private Judgment* ; &c.

In a Letter to a Young Clergyman.

S I R,

I Do not wonder at the *Surprize* with which you received, when we were last together, the *Advice* I ventur'd to give you in relation to the *Study of the Scriptures*. For one who is a *Clergyman* himself, to *seem* to dissuade *those of his own Order*, from a Study that has so many Arguments to recommend it ; and which, in the Opinion of *all good Men*, ought to be their *chief Business* ; has, I confess, the appearance of a strange *Paradox*, and That of the *worst Sort*. It looks like *Popery* and *Priest-craft* ; and therefore young and tender Minds may easily be forgiven, if they startle at the first Proposal of it ; Those especially, who have a just Sense of the *Excellency* and *Inspiration* of the *Scriptures*, and are eagerly bent on the Pursuit of such Truths, as more immediately tend to the

Advancement of *Virtue and Religion*. As *You* are of that Number, and went into Orders with no other View, but that you might the better study the *Scriptures* your self, and advance the Knowledge of them in the World ; it was not to be expected you should presently come into other Sentiments. Which I am so far from taking amiss, that I think it to your Commendation, that neither the *Affection*, nor *Esteem*, you so often express for an old Friend, could prevail with you to act a Part that might have the appearance of Levity in a Matter of so much Consequence. Nor is it less for your Credit, that you can retain your Opinion, without losing your Temper, or shewing a backwardness to hear what is to be said against it. Most Tempers run into Extremes : They are either too volatile to be fixed ; or else so fixed, that no Force of Argument can move them. But 'tis *your* Happiness, that you can adhere without Obstinacy, and change without Levity. And therefore I shall think it no trouble to resume the Subject, and lay before you in the best manner I can, the Reasons that *seem* to make against the Study of the *Scriptures* in the way of private Judgment ; which I hope will not upon cooler Thoughts appear so strange to you. You will consider they come from one, who is not more a Friend to *You* than he is to the Church. And, if Examples be of any weight, I can assure you this Side of the Question is by no means destitute of Profelytes ; and that when you come to know the World more, you will find this Study neglected to a Degree

Degree you little imagined. But 'tis *Reasons*, not *Examples*, will determine you. To come therefore to them ; let me in the

First place, observe to you, that the *Study of the Scriptures*, such a *thorough* Study of them I mean, as you aim at, is extremely *difficult*, and not to be successfully pursued, without a very great and constant *Application*, and a previous Knowledge of many other Parts of useful Learning. The *New Testament* cannot be understood without the *Old* ; The Truths revealed in one, are grounded on the *Prophecies* contained in the other ; Which makes the Study of the *Whole Scriptures* necessary to him, that would understand thoroughly a Part of them. Nor can the *Apocryphal Books*, how much soever they are generally slighted, be safely neglected ; there being a great Chasm of Five hundred Years between the End of the *Prophets*, and the Beginning of the *Gospel* ; which Period is of the *greatest* Use for the understanding of the New Testament, and yet is the *least* known. But now, if the *Old Testament* must be well studied, a good Knowledge of the *Oriental Tongues* is absolutely necessary. No Man can be ignorant, who knows any thing of Letters, that no Versions of old Books can be thoroughly depended on ; the Mistakes are so many, and sometimes of great Moment ; especially the Versions of Books writ in a Language *little understood*, and many Parts of it in a Style extremely *figurative*, and those Figures such as these Parts of the World are almost wholly Strangers to.

But

But put the Case *these Difficulties* were less than they are, is it an easy Matter to add to *Greek* and *Latin* the Knowledge of so many *other Languages*? Do not *they Two* alone find Work enough for most Scholars? What *Pains* then must a Man take, if he will study so many *others* besides? And if the Knowledge of the *Old Testament* could be dispenced with, give me leave to tell you that the Language even of the *New Testament* is not to be understand with so *little Pains* as is commonly imagined. 'Tis learnt indeed in Schools, and from hence thought to be the easiest *Greek* that can be read; But they who have read it in another manner than School-boys, know it to be quite otherwise. Not to mention the Difficulties peculiar to *St Paul*, whose Epistles are a very great Part of the *New Testament*; *Plato* and *Demosthenes* are in many respects not so hard, as even the *easier Books*. The Style indeed in the *Historical Books*, is plain and simple; but for all that, even *these Parts* have their Difficulty. And the whole is writ in a Language peculiar to the *Jews*: The Idiom is *Hebrew* or *Syriac*, though the Words be *Greek*; which makes some Knowledge of *those Languages*, still necessary.

Again, though it were not necessary to read the *Old Testament* in the *Original*, yet the *Greek Version* of it must be read, and that carefully; it being oftentimes the best, if not the only Help, to explain the Language of the *New*; besides that all Citations in the *New*, are generally made from it. But now, how *laborious* a thing

thing must it be, to study an ill Version of a very hard Book, which we cannot read in the Original? I call it an *ill Version*; for tho it be indeed a very good one, considering the Time it was writ in; yet as a Version, it must be allowed by those who can judge of it, to be far from being exact or true. A Man need only consult it on some hard places in the *Pantateuch*, as well as in the Poetick or Prophetick Books, to be convinced of this. 'Twas certainly far from perfect *at first*; and is made much *worse* by the Corruptions it has suffered in handing down to us: So that I may venture to affirm, that should any body now-a-days make a Version so imperfect; instead of Admiration and Esteem, his Work would be much despised by most of our modern Criticks.

I might to these add many *other Difficulties* that attend a serious Study of the *New Testament*. It requires a good Knowledge of the *Jewish* State at the Time of our Saviour's Coming, a Knowledge of their Government, Sanedrim, Synagogues, Customs, Traditions, Opinions, Sects; the Kinds of Learning received among them; what they borrow'd from the *Greeks*; when their Mystical and Allegorical Manner of Expounding the Scriptures began, and on what Grounds; what their particular Expectations were, in relation to the Messiah; and what they taught, and on what Grounds, in relation to Angels, Dæmons, Possessions, Oracles, Miracles, &c.

But 'tis in vain, you say, to tell you of *Difficulties*; You are resolved not to be deterr'd;
You

You have Time before you, good Eyes, a strong Constitution, a Mind prepared for Fatigue, a reasonable Degree of Skill in the Languages, and are furnished with a competent Knowledge in all the Parts of useful Learning that are preparatory to this Study ; So that *Difficulties* animate rather than dishearten you. And I am not unwilling so far to agree with you, that were there no Objection against this Study, but the *Difficulty* ; this alone should not deter one who is so well prepared for it. But if you are able to go through so *laborious* a Study, I presume you are not fond of *Difficulties* for *Difficulties* sake ; You cannot think it reasonable to take so much Pains, unless it will turn to *some good Account*. I shall therefore in the

II. *Second* place take leave to ask, *Cui bono?* What *Good* can come of so much Pains? For it may seem, that a *free, serious, impartial, and laborious* Study of the *Scriptures*, will be of no great Service, for the following Reasons.

1st. Because 'tis plain the *Orthodox* Faith is not founded on a nice and critical Knowledge of the *Scriptures*. Many of the ancient Christians, 'twill be allow'd, were not great Criticks, but argued very much in a mystical way. *Origen* in particular, who was the greatest Scholar Christianity had bred to that time, perpetually turns the Letter of Scripture into Allegory : From whence we may reasonably conclude, that the Knowledge of the bare *literal* Sense, was, in the Judgment of *Many* even in those Times, thought to be of little Use.

But

But 2dly, 'Tis certain that the *Original Language* of the Old Testament was known to very Few, for the first Six Centuries, in which those *General Councils* were held, wherein all the Articles of the *Orthodox Faith* were settled. They govern'd themselves and determin'd all their Controverted Points by the *Greek Version*; And those who knew *Hebrew* best, whether they took to the mystical or literal way, had the Misfortune to be *Least Orthodox*. So it was with *Origen*, who knew the Scriptures so well, that he had them all by heart. And *Eusebius* and Others, who studied and understood the literal Sense of the Scriptures best in the next Ages, succeeded little better. So that this Study seems to have been of little Use, to the *establishment* of the *Orthodox Faith*. Now if an Exact and Critical Knowledge of the *Scriptures*, was not necessary to the *Settling* of the Faith; it cannot be necessary to the *Understanding* of it, or to the understanding *those who have writ best* in the Explication and Defense of it. On the contrary, such a Knowledge tends to *lessen* our Esteem for the *Fathers* of the Church, by discovering their Mistakes; and may weaken our Regard to the Decisions of *Councils*, by exposing the *Falseness of the Ground* they seem to be built on. A Man well skill'd in the literal Sense of the Scriptures, will often find in the *Fathers and Councils*, Texts of Scripture urg'd very *insufficiently*; and great Strefs laid upon Passages, which, when critically explain'd, *prove nothing*, or perhaps make *against* them. Which suggests to me a *third Reason*, why it may seem

that such a Study can do no Good. And that is,

3dly, Because the *Orthodox Faith* does not depend upon the *Scriptures* considered absolutely in *themselves*, but as *explained by Catholick Tradition*. The Faith was preserved in *Creeds*, and handed down from one Orthodox Bishop to another, whose Business it was to keep this Sacred Depositum pure and undefiled, and to deliver it to his Successor entire as he received it. It was by *this Tradition* the main Articles of Faith were preserved in the Church, and not from any particular Study of the *Scriptures*. The Ground therefore of these Articles must carefully be distinguished, from the *Scriptures* that have been brought in *proof* of them. These Proofs may be weak and inconclusive; but the Truth stands independent of them. 'Tis the Faith they had received; and if at any time they argue weakly for it from the *Scriptures*, 'tis an Argument indeed against their *Learning*, but none against their *Orthodoxy*.

This therefore may seem another good Argument to prove, that an *Exact and Careful Study of the Scriptures*, is not a *safe and profitable Study*. 'Tis a much *safer*, as well as more *compendious* way to make a Man *Orthodox*, to study the *Tradition of the Church*.

But you will say, that to send you from *Scripture* to *Tradition*, is to turn you out of Paradise, the Garden of God, into a vast confused bewildered Wood; and that This is so far from mending the Matter, that 'tis ten times more laborious than

than the Study I would dissuade you from. And so, I confess it is ; if all the Ecclesiastical Writers were to be carefully read, in order to know the *Catholic Tradition*. But That is not my Meaning. The *Substance of Catholic Tradition*, lies in much less Compass. The *established Church*, you will allow, is *Orthodox* in all necessary Points. If therefore you know the Sense of the *established Church*, you have in Epitome the *Church Catholic* ; and therefore you need only study her Opinions, to make you *Orthodox*. And this, the most illiterate Man may find in the *Liturgy and Articles*. This, I trust, you will allow, is as *short* a way, as could be wished, of knowing all that is necessary to be known. A very little time will serve a Man to read, in his Mother-Tongue, things which altogether will not fill a moderate Volume ; And he will be *Orthodox* enough, and have a great deal of Time to spare for other Studies, that will turn to *more Account*. Besides that 'tis of great Advantage to go in a Way that is *Safe* as well as *Short* ; and will lead you into the Knowledge of all useful Truths, without the hazard of falling into any dangerous Opinions.

4^{thly}, But if you will insist, that 'tis *Scripture*, and not *Tradition*, that the Faith is founded on ; there is one thing further I must put you in mind of, which may seem to prove, that a *profound and laborious Study of the Scriptures* will not make you at all more *Orthodox*. 'Tis a fundamental Principle among Protestants, that whatever is *necessary* to be believed, is *plainly*

and clearly revealed in the Scriptures ; and consequently what is *not plainly and clearly* revealed in them, cannot be *necessary*. Now if what is *plain and clear* in Scripture, is the *Only Part* that is *necessary* to be known, then a *laborious* Search into the *obscurer* Parts may seem *unnecessary* to the obtaining a true Orthodox Faith. But you will say perhaps, that, notwithstanding this Declaration of Protestants, it may, and has been urged against them by their Adversaries, that they *do* believe and *maintain* as *necessary*, Articles that *cannot be proved* by *plain and clear* Passages of Scripture. This, I confess, has been urged, and may possibly be true of all Parties of them, except the *established Church*. But if it be, it proves only that They are not true to their Principle ; not that the Principle is not in it self True and Good. And He surely must be allowed to be the best Protestant, who adheres best to the Principle on which the Reformation was founded.

5thly, Once more : Supposing the Study of the Scriptures as *necessary* as you please ; in the *last* place I say, and I'm sure the World will say it with me, that they have been *sufficiently studied already* ; and if any Parts remain still obscure, *who* can hope to clear up Passages that have puzzled so many great Men ? or will presume in disputable Points to set up his *Private Judgment*, against Them that were Men of more Learning, of abler Parts, of greater Application, and better acquainted with the *Traditions of the Church*, than any one will now be allowed to be ?

be? And (which is the best Guide in the Knowledge of Religion,) they were moreover Men of most exemplary Piety, Devotion, and Humility; Virtues, of which very little Footsteps are to be found in the learned Men of our Times.

Must not now a Man have a strong bent of Mind indeed, who cannot by all these Reasons, be dissuaded from giving himself up to a *Study*, that may by many be thought as *unprofitable* as 'tis *laborious*? but will go on, in defiance of all that has been said to convince him that he wastes himself in vain, and that there will be *no Fruits* of all his Labour, but to know he knows *Nothing*? I call That *Nothing*, which will turn to *no Account*.

But to show you I am disposed to make all possible Concessions, I will grant that even this Objection might be got over, were this the worst of it: But I have one Argument still in reserve, that I am persuaded will be decisive. My

Third Argument then is this; That a *Painful, Exact, Impartial Study of the Scriptures*, will by some be thought not only to do *no Good*, but also a *great deal of Hurt*, both to the *Publick* and to *your self*.

1st, It will do Hurt to the *Publick*. It will disturb the *Peace of the Church*, and That cannot but have a malignant influence on the State.

'Tis certain that *Disputes* in the *Church*, disturb the *Peace* of it. And 'tis as certain these *Disputes* have been generally raised by Men pretending to a *Superiour Knowledge of the Scriptures*, and to Discoveries that have escaped others.

thers. The *Scriptures* have always been made this Use of by the *Hereticks* of old ; And 'tis the Character of the *great Hereticks* of this and the last Age ; who have set up for a *Free and Impartial Search into the literal Sense of the Scriptures*, above the rest of the Christian World : But with what Success ? They have purchased their pretended Knowledge of the *Scriptures* at the Expence of their *Reputation*, and their Study has destroy'd their *Orthodoxy*. And were not their Books and Opinions carefully suppress'd, and their Persons render'd odious to the People ; who knows what *Disturbances* they might have created to the Church ? On the other hand, the *Peace* the Church has enjoyed for many Years among its own Members, seems to be owing to no one thing more, than to a general *Neglect* of this Study ; And the *Dangers* that at present threaten its Tranquillity, come wholly from Men, who have endeavour'd to revive a Study, that has so often proved pernicious to its Peace.

Nor can it well be otherwise : For what Security has a Man that sets out in this Way ; that attempts to *study the Scriptures* in a free and impartial manner, laying aside all Prepossessions and previous Notions, resolving to see with his own Eyes, and judge for himself, and to believe nothing that he is not upon his own Search convinced is clearly contained in them ; What Security has such a Man, that he shall not fall into some *Opinions* that have been *already condemned* as erroneous and heretical, or which may interfere with those that are commonly received ?
Which ?

Which, if they do not immediately strike at any Fundamental Point, yet will be *thought* to do so; and may have a Tendency to put Scruples into weak Minds, and to disturb the *Peace of the Church*, by raising Doubts about the Meaning or Truth of some Articles, or by asserting that an explicate Belief of them is not necessary? 'Tis so natural for curious and inquisitive Minds to deviate from the common Road, and the Examples are so many, that 'tis odds but *You* do so too, unless you had more Lead in your Constitution, or a more resign'd Understanding, than any curious Man ever had yet: Otherwise you cannot be sure, that you shall not study your self into Doubts at least, if not into opposite Opinions concerning some *received* Notions. You will doubt perhaps of the *Authority* or *Author* of some Canonical Book, and think perhaps that some Passages are *interpolated*, or that some celebrated Texts are *not genuine*, or should be *otherwise read*, or have not been *rightly understood*, or do not *prove the Point they are commonly brought for*. You may fall into Notions that will be thought tending to *Arianism* or the like. You may reject *Arguments* brought from the *Old Testament*, to prove the *Trinity*; as trifling, and proving nothing but the Ignorance of Those that make use of them. You may think a *Prophecie* has a *literal* Meaning, where commonly the *Mystical* is thought the only one. You may think that *many Texts* in the *New Testament*, which are strong against the *Socinians*, do not prove against the *Arian* Notion. That the Title, *Son of God*, has not
always

always one uniform Meaning in the Gospel; and that That single Expression, of it self, is no Proof of any thing in God analogous to *Generation* in Men. That the *Identical Consubstantiality* of the *Son*, the *Eternal Proceſſion* of the *Spirit*, and many other Notions relating to the *Trinity*, tho' they may be true in themselves, are not so in Virtue of the *Texts* alledged for them. These Notions, *Learned Men* have fall'n into; and from thence 'tis to be presumed, you will not easily keep clear of them. I chuse to instance chiefly in Matters relating to the *Trinity*, because 'tis the Controversie now on foot: But the like may be said on many *other* Articles; in each of which the Truth is but One, but the Errors Infinite: And there is hardly any Notion with respect to any of them, which some learned Man, by following his own *Private Judgement*, instead of taking the *Doctrin* of the Church for his Guide, has not fall'n into.

Now if you should study your self into any *New* Opinions, or into *Old* ones that have been condemned, what will you do? Will you keep them to your self, or publish them? or shall I rather say, 'Tis no Question? The Authors of new Notions are apt to be very fond of them; They think it barbarous and cruel, to stifle the Infant in its Birth. There is a secret Pleasure in Singularity. To differ from the Vulgar, is in appearance to be *above* them; and to be distinguished from the Herd, is too great a Temptation to be easily resisted. But had you Prudence enough to govern your *Ambition*; *Conscience* may

may come in here, and make you do what *Ambition* could not. The Truths you think you have discovered, either are, or will be thought by you of too much *Importance* to the Honour of God and the Good of Religion, to be conceal'd. You will look on them as the *Blessings of God* on your Studies; and think it a Capital Crime to extinguish the Light, and suppress the Knowledge he has imparted to you. In short, You will think your self under the *bighest Obligation* not to dissemble in Religious Matters, and conceal from the Church of God, Opinions which you are convinced are not only true but of great Service to it. Let me then conclude, that the novel or revived Opinions which your *Study* leads you into, will be published to the World. What now will be the Consequence? Certain Mischief, but no certain Good at all. No Good, I say; for possibly your Notions may be wrong, or not of consequence; and, whether they are or not, the *Presumption* against you will be so strong, that your Notions will not be *received*, and perhaps not *examin'd*: They will be *condemned* as novel Notions, or as exploded ones. And, whatever you advance, 'twill be thought a certain Proof of its being of no Consequence, that in so many Ages it has never been *received*. There is no room therefore to expect, that what you advance, should be *received*, or do any *Good*. But the *Mischief* is sure and certain. It will raise *Scruples* in weak unstable Minds, sap the Foundations of the Orthodox Faith, and give a Handle to *Sceptical Men*; who, because some things are call'd

into doubt, (though incidental Matters only and of little Consequence,) will think they have a Right from thence to question every thing. Thus the Church and *establisht Faith* will suffer by the *Scruples* put into its *Friends*, and the *Handle* given to its *Enemies*. And when Religious Disputes are begun, *designing Men* know how to intermix Affairs of State with them; and then nobody knows where they will end, or what Mischiefs they may not do. Whereas if you can be content to go in the *beaten Road*; if you will *implicitly* submit to the *received Notions*; and humbly think the *Judgment of the Church*, where 'tis not the same, better than *your own*; you will be out of *Harm's Way*, and neither hurt the *Church* nor *your self*.

2. I add, *Your self*; as another Motive, that ought to have great Weight with you in this Question. For you cannot disturb the *Peace of the Church*, without being greatly a Sufferer *your self*. If you *really do not disturb its Peace*, 'tis all one, you will be *interpreted* to do it; and that will bring on you more Evils, than I would wish to my greatest Enemy. In a Word, you will be thought a *Heretick*; a Term, which there is a strange *Magick* in; though it has *no determinate Meaning* in the Mouth of the People, nor any *ill Meaning* in it self. 'Tis suppos'd to include in it every thing that is bad; it makes every thing appear odious and deform'd; it dissolves all Friendships, extinguishes all former kind Sentiments, however just and well deserved: And from the time a Man is deem'd a *Heretick*, 'tis Charity to act

act against all Rules of Charity; and the more they violate the Laws of God in dealing with him, 'tis, in their Opinion, doing God the greater Service.

That you may not think this is said at random, purely to frighten you into a Compliance with me; let me desire you to consider seriously the natural Consequences of being under the Imputation of *Herésie*. And the first I would observe, is, that from the Moment your People have this Opinion of you, you are incapacitated from working much Good upon them; and That, I'm sure, so good a Man as you are, must think to be a great Evil. While they think you *Orthodox*, your virtuous and inoffensive Behaviour, your strict Sobriety and Temperance, your affable and familiar Manner of conversing with them, your generous and charitable Regard to those who are sick or in distress; these good Qualities, joined to your plain and easie, but affectionate and moving Manner of instructing them, have a mighty Influence, and you may lead them as you please: They admire and endeavour to imitate your good Example: Your virtuous Conduct is a constant, though tacit, Reproof when they do amiss: The very Sight of you, is a Lecture of Virtue to them; and the Influence you have already had in the little Time you have been among them, is too visible to be denied. But from the time you are called *Heretic*, much of the Good you could have done, is at an end. Those who before had a secret Veneration of you, think it their Duty to *defame* and *injure* you: Your Virtue, they call Hypocrisie;

crisie; your Humility, Spiritual Pride. They look on you as an abandon'd Wretch; that God has withdrawn his Grace, and that the Devil is at the Bottom of all you have been doing: That nothing can better testifie their *Orthodoxy*, than to throw off all Regard both to your Doctrine and Example; And for fear they should seem to be infected with your Errours, they will return to the Vices you had perswaded them to leave; and, for the future, will take effectual care not to be the better for you.

No body can do much Good, whom the People do not think a good Man; and That cannot be expected, when so much Reproach and Infamy will, right or wrong, be heaped on you, if you do not continue *Orthodox*. And this you cannot doubt, if you will but reflect on what passes under your own Eyes. And therefore 'tis in vain to fancy your *Virtue* will protect you. No, the most *conspicuous Virtue* will not be believed. If you are guilty of no open Vices, secret ones will be imputed to you; Your Enquiries will be called *Vain, Curious* and *Forbidden* Studies. Pride and Ambition will be said to be the secret Springs of them: A *Search after Truth*, will be called a *Love of Novelty*. The doubting of a single Text, will be *Scepticism*; the denial of an Argument, a *renouncing of the Faith*. To say what the Scriptures have said, and in the very same Words too, if not explained in the common Way, will be *Blasphemy*; and the most sincere Concern for the Honour of Almighty God, you cannot be sure will not be interpreted *down-right Atheism*.

Atbeism. Every thing you say or do, will have a wrong Turn given it. A Slip of Memory, shall be made wilful Prevarication ; A Mistake in a Citation, Forgery and Corruption ; An Errour in an incidental Point of Learning, shall be a good Proof, that you *know Nothing* ; Every inaccurate Expression, shall be pressed into a Crime ; Any little Warmth of Temper, shall be aggravated into Pride and Positiveness, into a Contempt of Authority, and ill Manners. In short, all the Indiscretions of a Man's former Life shall be ript up ; and nothing forgiven, that can be remembered or strained to his Disadvantage. And Where is the Man that can be fond of such Usage ? For my part, I am free to declare, I am afraid I should not have Virtue or Courage enough, to undergo such a fiery Trial.

Now all this a Man will draw upon himself, that brings himself under the Imputation of *Heresie* : Whereas the *Orthodox* Man lives quiet and at ease, unmolested and unenvied. His Faults (and who has not some ?) shall be extenuated or excused, if not quite buried in oblivion ; His want of Temper, shall be a commendable Zeal ; his Indiscretion, Good Nature ; his Mistakes shall be imputed to Haste or Inadvertency ; and, when they cannot be defended, it will be argued in his Favour, that the greatest Men sometimes err, and the Writers of the first Rank are not always in the right ; Or perhaps a Mistake shall turn to his Advantage ; It will be shown to be an Errour on the right Side, and that a good Cause drew him into it. His Learning on the other

other Hand shall be magnified beyond measure ; every body will be full of his good Qualities, and his Virtues shall be set in the best Light to shew themselves and cover his Faults : In a word, *Orthodoxy* atones for all *Vices*, and *Herésie* extinguishes all *Virtues*. That this is nothing but the bare Truth, I appeal to what you every Day hear and see your self.

There are, you know, *Two Clergymen* of the Town, who have studied themselves into *Heresy*, or at least into a *Suspicion* of it : Both of them Men of *fair unblemished Characters*. One has all his Life been cultivating Piety and Virtue and good Learning. Rigidly constant *himself* in the publick and private Duties of Religion ; and always promoting in *Others*, Virtue and such Learning as he thought would conduce most to the Honour of God, by manifesting the Greatness and Wisdom of his Works. He has given the World sufficient Proofs that he has not mispent his Time, by very useful Works of *Philosophy* and *Mathematicks*. He has applied *One* to the Explication of the *Other*, and endeavoured by *Both* to display the Glory of the Great Creator. And to his Study of Nature, he early join'd the Study of the *Scriptures* ; and his Attempts, whatever the Success be, were at least well meant : And, considering the Difficulty of the Subjects he has engaged in, it must be allowed that in the main they are *well aimed*. And if he has not succeeded, no more have others who have meddled with the same Subjects. Nor is he more to be blamed, than they. To be *blamed*, did I say ?
I should

I should have said, not less to be *commended*. For sure 'tis a *commendable* Design, to explain Scripture-Difficulties, and to remove the Objections of profane Men, by shewing there is nothing in the Sacred Writings, but what is true and rational.

But what does a Life thus spent, avail? To what Purpose so many watchful Nights, and weary Days? So much Piety and Devotion? So much Mortification and Self-denial? Such a Zeal to do Good, and to be useful to the World? So many noble Specimens of a great Genius, and of a fine Imagination? 'Tis the poor Man's Misfortune, (for *Poor* he is, and like to be, not having the least Preferment,) to have a warm Head, and to be very zealous in what he thinks the Cause of God. He thinks Prudence, the worldly Wisdom condemned by Christ and his Apostles; and that 'tis gross Prevarication and Hypocrisie, to conceal the Discoveries he conceives he has made. This Heat of Temper betrays him into some indiscreet Expressions and hasty Assertions. Designing to hurt no body, he fancies no body designs to hurt *Him*, and is simple enough to expect the same favourable Allowances will be made to *him*, that he sees made to those who write against him. As to his Learning, 'tis his Misfortune that he is not skill'd enough in the learned Languages, to be a great Critick in them; and yet seems not to be sensible of his Deficiency in this respect. And what Advantage is taken of this, that he has not *less Heat* and *more Criticism*. *His Learning* is treated in that manner, that you would

would think he did not know the first Elements of *Greek*, though even in That, he is much superiour to most of those who make so free with him : And you every Day hear his Performances run down as Whimsies and Chimera's, by Men who never *read* them, and, if they did, could not *understand* them. Nor does his *Warmth of Temper* come off better : 'Tis all over *Obstinacy, Pride* and *Heretical Pravity* ; a want of *Modesty* and due *Deference* to just Authority. They that speak most favourably, look upon him as *craz'd*, and little better than a *Madman*. This is the poor Man's Character ; and, low as he is, they cannot be content to leave him quiet in his Poverty. Whereas, had he not been early possess'd with a passionate love for the *Scripture* and *Philosophy* ; had he not thought it his Duty above all things to promote the *Glory of God*, and been perswaded That could no way be so well done as by the Study of his *Word* and *Works* ; 'tis more than probable he had at this time been *Orthodox* : And then, instead of his present Treatment, his Faults would have been overlook'd ; the Learning he excels in, would have been extoll'd, and no Defect would have been found in other Parts of it : He would have been cried up as an Ornament of the Age, and no Preferment would have been denied or envied him.

This you know to be the Case with One of the *New Hereticks*. The *Other* is so prudent in his Conduct, that he comes under but a *Suspicion* of favouring the same Notions. How now is *He* treated ?

treated ? *Prudence in Him*, is as great a Crime as the *want of it* in the *Other*. The *imprudent* Man is treated as a Madman and a rank *Arian* : The *Prudent* one, is *less a Heretick*, but *more dangerous* : *Sobrius accessit ad evertendam Ecclesiam* ; and therefore the greater Alarm must be rais'd against *Him*. And what has He done ? Why, he has with a great deal of Pains brought together in the best Manner he could, all the Passages in the New Testament relating to the Doctrine of the *Trinity*. And so far, his Work is what those who differ from him, should be pleased with ; since he has brought the *Materials* together, to enable Men to form a right Judgment of the Question in Dispute ; and has put into their Hands, if he be in the wrong, the best Weapons against himself. But he has *interpreted some Texts*, in a manner that is not liked : 'Tis true, he has so ; but not once, that I remember, has he given an Interpretation that is purely of *his own Head*. He brings *great Vouchers*, and, if he errs, it is always in *good Company* : This is his Offence : He has maintained with many others, particularly with the late Dean of *St Paul's*, in opposition to *Sabellianism*, that the *Three Persons of the Trinity* are *Three real distinct Beings* : and the belief of Three really distinct Beings *perfectly Equal*, he maintains with *Dr South* to be *Tritheism* : And that there *must* therefore be a *Subordination*. Now whether this Notion be right, or not ; if *He* cannot escape *ill Treatment*, give me leave to say, that if your Study should lead you into any Opinionis contrary to what is generally

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generally received, You can with no Reason expect *better Quarter*. He is a Man who has *all the good Qualities* that can meet together, to commend him. He is posselt of *all* the Parts of *Learning* that are valuable in a Clergyman, in a Degree that few possess any *single one*. He has joined to a good Skill in *the three Learned Languages*, a great Compass of the best *Philosophy* and *Mathematicks*; as appears by his *Latin Works*; And his *English* ones are such a Proof of his own *Piety*, and of his *Knowledge in Divinity*, and have done so much *Service to Religion*, as would make any other Man, that was not under the Suspicion of *Heresie*, secure of the Friendship and Esteem of all good Churchmen, especially of the Clergy. And to all this *Piety* and *Learning*, and the good Use that has been made of it; is added a *Temper* happy beyond Expression: A sweet, easie, modest, inoffensive, obliging Behaviour, adorn all his Actions; and no Passion, Vanity, Insolence, or Ostentation, appear either in what he Writes or Says: And yet these Faults are often incident to the best Men, in the freedoms of Conversation, and in writing against impertinent and unreasonable Adversaries, especially such as strike at the Foundations of Virtue and Religion. This is the *Learning*, this the *Temper* of the Man, whose *Study of the Scriptures* has betrayed him into a *Suspicion* of some *Heretical Opinions*: And because it has, he must be *blackened* and *defamed*; he must be worried out of the great and clear Reputation he is possessed of: And he that has so many shining Qualities, must

must be insulted by every *worthless Wretch*, as if he had as little Learning and Virtue as the lowest of those who are against him. What Protection now can you promise your self from your Virtue, when a Man of *such* a Character cannot be safe in his good Name? Whatever therefore you do, be *Orthodox*: *Orthodoxy* will cover a *Multitude of Sins*, but a *Cloud of Virtues* cannot cover the want of the minutest Particle of *Orthodoxy*.

'Tis expected, no matter how unreasonably, that a Man should always adhere to the Party he has once taken: 'Tis the Opinion of the World, that he is all his Life bound by the Subscriptions he made in his first Years; as if a Man were as wise at Twenty-four, and knew as much of the Scripture and Antiquity and could judge as well of them, as he can at Fifty. And yet if a Man *will be studying* these things, he cannot be sure he shall continue a Year together in the *same Sentiments*: And, if he should not, he must either stifle his Persuasion, against the Dictates of his Conscience; or be expos'd to the worst Treatment, to be call'd a *Renegado*, a *False Brother*, a *Heretick*, or any thing that *Malice* can suggest.

But I have not yet done. This is not the worst of it. This perhaps you may pretend to despise, and not care what the World says of you, so long as your *Conscience* cannot reproach you. Well; let then all Concern for Reputation go: Can you be Proof against *one farther Consequence* of lying under the Imputation of *Heresie*? Can

you bear to see your self, your Wife and Children, ruin'd and undone ? This, I see, startles you.—But you ask ; *What Danger can there be of that ?* An *Englishman*, you say, is out of the Reach of *Persecution* or an *Inquisition* : That Spirit, God be thanked, is banished the Land ; and even *convict Hereticks* are protected from the *Flames*. Very true ; The Spirit of *Persecution* is either gone, or is disarm'd ; and That I look on as one of the invaluable Blessings of the Revolution : But can you be sure it will not return ? And suppose it will not ; Are you therefore secure, that an Imputation of *Heresie* will not end in the Ruine of your self and Family. You and your Children will not be *burnt* indeed ; but you may be as effectually ruin'd, as if you were. You may be *excommunicated* ; and in Virtue of That be thrown into Jail, to rot there, while your Family are starving. And, (which cannot be too well consider'd,) when once you come into those Circumstances, what is there can deliver you ? Your Punishment will last and be the same, as long as you continue in the same Mind. A Rule of Punishment peculiar to the *Ecclesiastick* State. In *Civil* Cases, the Offender, if his Crime be not Capital, suffers a *Temporary* Punishment, proportion'd to the Fault he has committed ; and when he has undergone that, nothing further is required of him, except in some Cases to find Security for his good Behaviour for the future. But in Cases of *Heresie*, there is no regard to the *Degree* of the Offence, in the Punishment inflicted. Nor is there any *End* of it. 'Tis not enough to have

have suffer'd the *severest* Punishment, though for the *smallest* Offence ; 'tis not enough to give Security of not offending for the future ; The innocent Offender must declare (what 'tis oftentimes *impossible* he should declare,) that he has changed his Sentiments, and is become *Orthodox* ; and This, though perhaps no Methods of *Conviction* have been used, except that of *Punishment* be one. This is the miserable Condition of a *Convict Heretick* : The Punishment which fell on him for *expressing* Thoughts *Heretical*, he must *continue* to endure for *barely Thinking* ; Which is a Thing not in his own Power, but depends on the *Evidence* that appears to him : He must for ever (cruel Justice !) for ever suffer for his *Private Thoughts* (tho' they go not beyond his own Heart,) the Punishment which some Overt-Act has once drawn upon him. To punish *Toties quoties*, as often as those Over-Acts are repeated, will not satisfy the *Holy Office* : Nor can a forbearance of such Acts avail any thing, or a Promise of Silence for the future ; which yet is all that is in a Man's Power. No ; he must *recant*, whether he can or not ; and generally 'tis required to be done in Words drawn up for him : So that if he do not see reason to change his Opinion, and will not say he has changed, when he has not ; he is in for Life, and his Punishment can only end with it.

Indeed, on every Supposition, a Man excommunicated for *Heresie* has a sad Time of it. For if he *does not* recant, he is (as I have said) in Prison for Life, and his Family must starve ; and
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if he *does* recant, what does he get by it : His Liberty indeed, but What else ? Will People believe he is sincere ? Will they not think his Recantation loosely drawn in favour of him, to make it a Recantation in *Appearance* only ? Or, if it be in the strongest Words, will he not, if he submit to it, be suspected to *equivocate* ? Will they not expect the *Reasons* of his Change ? Will they not ask, (if he says no more for the *Orthodox* Side than has been said before,) why, if these Reasons are convincing now, he did not think them so before ? Will they not conclude, that *to him* they are inconclusive still ; unless he can find better Reasons than the best that had been before offered him ? Which I take to be a Contradiction. And will it not be argued from thence, that he is not changed ? that 'tis the Punishment only, and not his Opinions, he would leave ? So that if he *continues* in his Opinions, he must lie under all the Infamy and Punishment of *Heresie* ; and if he does *not*, yet it will be suppos'd he does. He is punish'd for acting *according to his Conscience* ; and, if he would leave the *Heresie* imputed to him, He will be said to act *against his Conscience* ; and perhaps be reputed a *worse* Man than he was before. Thus in all Events : once a *Heretick*, and always miserable. The Reputation, (change, or not,) is never to be retrieved ; no Preferment or Employment to be hoped for. He will always be suspected of *Heresie*, who is once guilty ; and his Wife and Children must see him the perpetual Subject of Reproach and Obloquy ; and feel it too : Feel

it in their Character, feel it in their Maintenance ; as if the Children of a *Heretick* were a Brood of Monsters, a Nuisance to the Commonwealth, and infected the very Air they breath in.

These Misfortunes, a Man of the most *unblemished Life* may draw upon himself and Family, if he will be meddling with so *dangerous* a Study, and cannot in *Conscience* dissemble the result of it. Misfortunes, which the *vilest, lewdest, most immoral* Wretch upon Earth, is in no danger of. The greatest *Immoralities*, nay, a long *Course* of them, shall oftentimes escape unpunished ; especially if a Man be very *Orthodox* : But if they do not, the Punishment extends only to the *Person* of the Offender. It derives no *Infamy* on *himself* if he reforms, nor on his *Children* if he do not. They are rather *pitied* for having such a Father, and every body is willing to be kind to them. Who now, after this, can be fond of a Study, that may bring on him, let him be never so innocent, such a Load of Misery and Infamy, a Load without Measure and without End ? And if this will be the Consequence of *Excommunication*, tell me how much better 'tis than *Persecution*.

But you will say, that 'tis possible a Man's Studies *may not* lead him into any *Heretical* Opinion ; and if they should, yet 'tis not very easie to *convict* a *Heretick*, or to say *what is Heresie*. To the *first*, I have already said enough : As to the *other*, I confess 'tis not very easie to *convict* a Man of *Heresie*. The Law seems to be *deficient* in this Point ; But Who knows how soon

soon this Defect may be supply'd by a *new Law* ; And in the mean time, it may be *difficult* indeed to convict a Man of *Heresie* ; but perhaps it may be found not to be *impossible*. And, if it should, 'tis but changing the Word, and the Offender may be come upon easily enough. If, through a Defect in the Laws, he cannot be convicted of *Heresie*, He may however be convicted of Writing or Speaking *against* the established Doctrine of the Church ; and That will draw on him all the same Consequences, that *Heresie* would do. For *Heresie* is the opposing the Doctrine of the *Catholick* Church ; But the Doctrine of the *established* Church, will readily be supposed to be the Doctrine of the *Catholick* Church ; and therefore to oppose the Doctrine of one, is in effect to oppose both. So that a Man shall be deemed a *Heretick* to all Intents and Purposes, and sentenced to the same Punishment ; though in the Sentence it self, for his Comfort, the Word *Heresie* may be left out.

But you are willing to think the *Temper* of the *English* Clergy more moderate, and the generality of them averse to every thing that looks like the *Spirit of Popery* ; as the ruining of a good Man, merely for Matters of Opinion, must be allowed to do. I wish you may find it so, if ever there should be occasion. I confess there has appear'd a *good Spirit*, a very *Humane* and *Christian* Temper in Some late Writings, where perhaps it was not much expected ; but for all that, I must beg leave to differ from you. If indeed no one would *judge* in a Cause he did not understand ;

stand ; if no one were allowed to understand a Cause of *Herésie*, but who was a good Judge of the *Sense of Scripture* and of *Primitive Antiquity* ; if no one were esteemed to know Scripture and Antiquity, but those who had *studied them well*, who had read them carefully with *their own Eyes*, and did not take the Sense of them *upon Trust* from Modern Writers ; if the *Arguments* for his Opinion were to be *examined*, before his Opinion were condemned ; if a Man, before he gave his Vote, were to lay his Hand upon his Heart, and declare himself thus qualified to judge, that he had consider'd the Matter, and would speak nothing but what he Thought ; On these Suppositions, I am apt to think, a number of Judges would not very easily be found ; and, when they were, it may reasonably be presumed that they would not be very forward to condemn. They would be sensible there was room for honest Minds to be mis-led, from what they had read and observed themselves ; They would know that there is more to be said on the other Side, than the Generality at all dream of ; They would be careful how they discourag'd Learning, by discouraging the Enquiries of learned Men. They would be very unwilling a Man should suffer by their Sentence, whose Life they are sure is innocent and virtuous, but whose Opinions they cannot be so sure are false or dangerous. They know Discouragements in Learning and Virtue to be of such ill Consequence, that a Man's Opinions must be very bad indeed, to make it necessary to come to such Extremities. But give

me leave to say, you have no Reason to expect such Judges, or such a backwardness to judge. 'Tis always *supposed*, that the Doctrine of the Church you are of, is right ; that it is the Doctrine of Scripture and Antiquity. And this, every body thinks he understands. So that little Learning or Reading is necessary to make any Clergyman a Judge over the learned'st Man alive.

Another thing I take leave to tell you, is, that most Men think they can do *Conscienciously*, whatever they can do *Legally*. Men of *refin'd and exalted Understandings*, who have a large Compass of Thought, and have lookt into the Principles of Things, know that *written Laws* are but Deductions of the *Law of Nature*, which is *prior* to all *Humane Institutions* : That these sometimes deviate from that *unwritten Law* ; and, when they do, are of no real intrinsic Authority. They know that a thing is not *just and reasonable* because it is *enacted* ; but, in good Governments, is *enacted*, because 'tis *just and reasonable* ; they know that *Laws* are sometimes obtain'd by Surprise or Corruption, by Party-management, by Craft or Superstition. They know that Penal Laws in Matters of Religion, are seldom advisable. They would not easily contribute to the making them ; and, when they are made, would be glad to have them generally lie Dormant. They know that no *Authority of Man* can alter the *Nature of Things*, or justify a *Cruel or Unjust* Sentence in the Sight of God. They are sure, that if to punish Men for their Opinions be not *very right*, there is no Medium, it must be *very wrong*.

wrong. 'Tis publick Robbery or Murder, to deprive a Man of his Life or Goods, for his Religion ; if it be not *just in it self* to do so, as well as *Legal*.

Some perhaps may think in this manner ; but these must be Men of refin'd and exalted Understandings ; and therefore must be very *few*. The *Generality* think they may do *justly* whatever they can do *Legally*. And it is, no doubt, for *Them*, a good Rule. They cannot judge of the Nature of Things for *themselves* ; and therefore *the Law* is the most proper Guide and Direction *they* can have. As long therefore as there are Laws to punish the Asserters of *Heretical Opinions*, or such as *oppose the established Doctrines* ; you may depend on it, they will not be suffered to lie dormant. There will never be wanting great Numbers, who will call aloud to have them put in execution ; and they will think their Zeal in this Matter, the *best* Service they can do the Church.

This is *Humane Nature* : Thus it has been in all Times. And no Experience of the Mischief done to Christianity by a forwardness to pronounce Anathema's on those who dissent from the *received* Opinions, will make us wiser. It may, I doubt not, be *demonstrated* with the greatest Evidence, that all *Christian Churches* have suffered more by their Zeal for *Orthodoxy*, and by the violent Methods taken to promote it ; than from the utmost Efforts of their *greatest Enemies*. But, for all that, the World will still think the same Methods necessary. The same Zeal, will prompt

to the same *Persecutions* or *Prosecutions*, (call them which you will,) without considering that the *same Means* must necessarily produce, at long-run, the *same fatal Consequences*.

Let me therefore entreat you, not to fancy the World is alter'd in this Point. Do not think your Opinions *cannot* ruin you, because 'tis *not reasonable* they should. Do not flatter your self, that *Temper, Prudence* and *Moderation*, can in Religious Controversies get the better of *indiscreet Zeal, Bigotry* and *Superstition*. In short ; be not hasty in espousing of Opinions, which can have no other Effect, but to lay the *best Men* at the Mercy of the *worst*. Every *mean Person*, who has nothing to recommend him but his *Orthodoxy*, and owes that perhaps wholly to his *Ignorance* ; will think he has a Right to trample on you with Contempt ; to asperse your Character with virulent Reflections ; to run down your Writings as mean and pitiful Performances, and give *hard Names* to Opinions he *does not understand* ; Which you must bear, without the least hopes of being heard a Word in your Defense.

Let me observe one thing more ; that 'tis the Misfortune of a *Clergyman*, that he is confined to *One Profession*. Other Men, if they cannot live in *one Way*, are at liberty to try *another* : But a Man who has once the *indelible* Character, must live by the *one Profession* he has made his Choice. If therefore That *Livelihood* be taken from him ; 'tis in vain he has *Learning, Parts, Industry*, and *Application*. He will not be allowed to take *any other Course* to repair the Loss he suffers

suffers by his Opinions as a Clergyman. His Time, and Fortunes, and Studies, have been spent to make him useful in that *one* Profession ; and, if he had Abilities to maintain himself in *any other*, 'tis too late : He has made his Choice, and must abide by it. This then is the unhappy Dilemma a *reputed Heretick* is reduced to ; he will neither be suffer'd to *keep* the Profession, nor to *leave* it ; he shall neither live *in it*, nor *out of it*. So that, notwithstanding his *Learning, Parts, Virtue, and Industry* ; tho' he could make a good *Lawyer, Physician, Merchant, or Mechanick* ; if he be not *Orthodox*, all possibilities of living comfortably, at least, and reputably, are taken from him. Go now, and think, if you can, that the Advice I give you is not the Advice of a Friend. 'Tis the Advice of one who loves Virtue and Learning, who is a Friend to all good Men, and is in particular greatly concern'd for *your* Success and Advancement in the World. 'Tis Advice seconded by the Examples of the greatest Men. For name me any one of the Men most famed for Learning in this or the last Age, who have seriously turned themselves to the Study of the Scriptures. I might name to you the most eminent Men down from *Scaliger* and *Casaubon* to the present Time. *Capellus* indeed, and the excellent *Grotius*, are Exceptions ; but they met with such *Usage*, that one has little Encouragement from their Examples. But not to go beyond our own Country ; Who are the Men that have excelled most (excepting always *Sir Isaac Newton*) in Philosophy, Astronomy

nomny and Mathematicks ? Have they not been *Clergymen* ? And was not their Skill in these Sciences, the Effect of their great and constant Application to them ? Was not That Time spent in *these Studies*, that you think should have been applied to the *Study of the Scriptures* ? On the other hand, take out Two or Three from so great a Body, and where is there a Clergyman of a great Genius, and that has made a chief Figure in the Learned World, that has writ upon the *Scriptures* ? at least with any masterly Skill in Critick ?

And *what* is it, that all this can be imputed to ? Did these learned Men decline this Study, because they wanted the *Abilities* proper for it ? Surely That will not be said of Men of their confest Learning. Or was there want of *Inclination* and *Good-will* to it ? No, they were Men of *Virtue*, and *good Protestants*, as well as Scholars and Men of Letters. What then ? Did they, who have taken so much Pains upon *other Books*, and with so much Success, think *the Scriptures* the only ones that *needed not* their Help ? Neither can That be pretended. They saw the Sacred Books, through the *Injury of Time* and the *Ignorance of Scribes*, had *suffer'd* as well as others ; and much more by *false and absurd Interpretations*. To be plain : The *One Thing* that turned them from so noble and necessary a Study, was the *want of Liberty*, which, in this *Study Only*, is denied Men. They found it was *dangerous* to examine *impartially* and speak *freely* ; that they must write *without Liberty*.

berty, or with *no Safety* ; that it would be expected of them, to strain all their Wit and Learning to *patronize* and *palliate* gross Errours, instead of *exposing* or *mending* of them ; and to support the *received Interpretations*, however absurd, instead of such as *Reason* and *Learning* convinced them were the *only true ones*. But This was a Task, which Men of *ingenuous Minds*, whose *Integrity* and *Love of Truth* was equal to their Penetration and great Abilities, could not submit to ; For Men to have Eyes and Understandings of their own, and yet not to see or understand, but as they were bid, and That by Men who could not see or understand themselves ; *ὡς ἀργαλίον πρῶγμα!* To make such a blind Use of their Learning and Abilities, was, they thought, to pervert the very End of them, and really to dishonour God, whose Service they were given for. Since therefore they could not bear the Thoughts of studying the Scriptures *on these Terms*, no Part was left Men who could not be idle, but to *turn to some other Study*, in which, without fear of Danger or Offense, they might freely go whither *Truth* and *Reason* led. The Consequence of which, besides the Improvements made in Arts and Sciences, has been, that many of them have separately made more good Emendations, and happily explained more Difficulties, in the *smallest Pagan Writer*, than they have done, take them All together, in Two Hundred Years upon the *whole Body of the Scriptures*.

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What then I would advise you, is, to follow such Examples. Turn your self to the Study of the *Heathen Historians, Poets, Orators, and Philosophers*. Spend *Ten or Twelve Years* upon *Horace* or *Terence*. To illustrate a *Billet-doux*, or a *Drunken Catch* ; to explain an *obscene Jest* ; to make a *happy Emendation*, on a Passage that a modest Man would *blush* at ; will do you more Credit, and be of greater Service to you, than the most useful Employment of your Time upon the *Scriptures* ; unless you can resolve to conceal your Sentiments, and speak always with the Vulgar. You see a present Example in the great *Bentley* : What a Reputation has he acquir'd by the noble Edition he has given us of *Horace* ? How are his Abilities confess'd and admir'd by all ? But had the same Genius, the same Sagacity and Labour, been applied to the Study of the *Scriptures*, to Settle the Text in doubtful Places, to Mend corrupted ones, Explain hard ones, Fix the Meaning of obscure ones, and to Trace out the literal Sense where it can be done ; should he, I say, have attempted a Work of this Kind ; instead of Thanks and Applause, 'tis more than probable he would have been treated as a rash Man, of no Judgment, of little Learning, and less Religion ; and, if his Works had been sentenced to the Flames, a Majority would have been for throwing him in after them.

Consider well therefore, how you engage where there is no Retreat, no Repentance, no room for Pardon, if you once offend. You have

have *Two* Ways before you. *One* will enable you to be useful in the World, without great Trouble to your self; it will crown your Labours with Success; it will bring you Reputation and Esteem; it will put you into a Way of making a decent Provision for your Family, and giving a good Education to those Two fine Children God has blessed you with, and you may have many more. The *Other* will it self fatigue you with many Difficulties, and expose you to the most fatal Consequences; It will draw on you an insupportable Load of Infamy, as a Disturber of the *Church*, and an Enemy to the *Orthodox Faith*; and in all probability end in the extreme Poverty and Ruin of your self and Family. Which God forbid should ever be the Case of one who has no other Views but to dedicate his Life to God's Service. I am,

S I R,

Your Faithful Humble Servant,

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The CONCLUSION.

AFTER all that has been said in this long Letter, I am persuaded that Many Readers will still think what is here advanced, a strange Paradox, or perhaps be scandalized at it as a very wicked one; and will on no Terms allow, that Clergymen should lay aside what *ought* to be their *chief Study*. And, to be ingenuous, I will confess I am *entirely of the same Mind*. I am as unwilling, as *They* can be, to admit the Conclusion, that the *Study of the Scriptures* should be *deserted*; and yet cannot deny, but, humanely speaking, this must be the Consequence from these Premises. If therefore we will not allow the *Conclusion*, we must show the *Premises* to be untrue, and that This Study will *not* be attended with *so much Danger*. But This we in vain attempt, if we do not *our* Parts at least, that these may *not* be the *Consequences*. For as long as they are, the *Study of the Scriptures* will *certainly* continue to be *neglected*, as it *Now* is; And all Men who *contribute* to these *Consequences* in any Degree, do so far *discourage* the *Study of the Scriptures*, *whatever* they pretend.

In Truth, there is nothing more absurd, than to say the glorious Things we do daily of the Scriptures; and, at the same time, make the Study of them, to Men of sincere and honest Minds, so extremely *hazardous* and *inconvenient*. If then we would not be guilty of *discouraging* a Study, which we acknowledge to be the *great*
Duty

Duty of the Clergy, as we are Christians ; if we would be true to the Fundamental Principles, of the Reformation, as Protestants, that the Scriptures are the only Rule of Faith ; Let us use our best Endeavours to remove the great Obstacles that lie against the Study of them ; Let us do what we can, that learned Men may have full Liberty to study the Scriptures freely and impartially ; good Incouragement given them to go through the Labour and Difficulties of such a Study, not slightly and superficially, but with such Application and Diligence as the Nature of the Thing requires ; and have Leave to speak their Sense with all manner of Safety : That their Opinions may be examin'd fairly and with Temper ; that their Names be not unjustly loaded with Calumny and Slander ; that their Words and Actions may be interpreted with the same Candour, as is shown to those that differ from them : That, if what they advance be right, it may be received ; if wrong, their Errors may be refuted, as the Mistakes of learned Men on other Subjects ; If doubtful, and the Scriptures say so little, or speak so obscurely, that nothing can certainly be decided either way, that then no body may be obliged to take either Side as necessary : That, whether their Notions be right or wrong, their Persons may in all Events be safe, and their Maintenance not affected by it : That, as long as they live virtuously, and write with all due Modesty and good Manners, and advance nothing that breaks in upon Morality and Government, they may be treated in all respects as Those are or ought to be

who imploy themselves in any other Part of useful Learning.

I must add, let them be never so much in the *Wrong*, I can apprehend no *Danger* from it to the *Church*; or that the Errors of a few Men, can have any considerable Influence in opposition to a great Body of a vigilant and learned Clergy, who will be always able and ready to *defend* the *received* Notions, if they *can be* defended; and if they *cannot*, it must be allowed they *ought not*. But if *some Inconveniencies* would arise from the Liberty I contend for, they are *nothing in comparison* of those that must follow from the want of it.

Till there is such a Liberty allowed to Clergymen; till there is such a Security for their Reputations, Fortunes, and Persons; I fear I must add, till so difficult a Study meets with proportionable *Encouragement*; 'tis impossible a *sincere, impartial* and *laborious Application* to it, should generally prevail: And till it does, it is as impossible the *Scriptures* should be *well understood*: And till they are, they are a Rule of Faith in *Name* only. For 'tis not the *Words* of Scripture, but the *Sense*, which is the *Rule*: And so far as *That* is not *understood*, so far the *Scriptures* are *not our Rule*: whatever we pretend; but the *Sense that Men have put on them*; Men fallible as our selves, and who were by no means so well *furnished*, as the Learned at present are, with the proper Helps to find out the true Meaning of *Scripture*. And while we take the *Sense* of the *Scriptures* in this manner upon *Content*, and
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see not with our own Eyes ; we insensibly relapse into the *Principles of Popery*, and give up the *only Ground* on which we can justify our Separation from the Church of Rome. 'Twas a *Right to study and judge of the Scriptures for themselves*, that our *first Reformers* asserted with so good effect ; and their *Successors* can defend their adherence to them, on *no other Principle*.

If then we are *concerned* for the Study of the Scriptures, further than *in Words* ; if we in earnest *think* them the *only Rule of Faith* ; let us *act* as if we thought so : Let us heartily encourage a *free and impartial Study* of them ; Let us lay aside that *malignant, arbitrary, persecuting, Popish Spirit* ; Let us put no Fetters on Mens Understandings, nor any other Bounds to their Enquiries, but what *God and Truth* have set. Let us, if we would not give up the *Protestant Principle*, that *the Scriptures are plain and clear in the necessary Articles* ; declare *nothing* to be *necessary*, but what is *clearly revealed* in them.

Then may we hope to see the Study of these Divine Books so happily cultivated by the united Labours of the Learned, when under no Discouragements ; that All may in the Main agree in the true Meaning of them. Places that *can be understood*, they will agree in understanding alike ; such at least as are of *Consequence* to the Faith. And for such as are *too obscure to be cleared up with any certainty*, those likewise they will agree about, and unanimously confess they are such as *no Article of Faith can be grounded upon, or proved from*. Next to the understanding

a Text of Scripture, is to know it can't be certainly understood. When the clear and dark Parts of Scripture are thus distinguished, an *Unity* may then reasonably be hoped for among *Protestants* in *necessary Points*; And a *Difference of Opinion* in such as are *not necessary*, can have no *manner of ill Consequence*, nor any way disturb the Peace of the Church; since there will then be nothing left in its *Doctrines*, to *inflame Mens Passions*, or *feed their corrupt Interests*, when we are all *agreed* about what is *essential* to Religion; and what is *not essential*, is look'd on as *indifferent*; so that a Man may take *one Side*, or the *other*, or *neither*, or may *change*, as he sees Reason, without Offense.

Upon the whole, a *free and impartial Study of the Scriptures*, either *ought* to be encouraged, or it *ought not*. There is *no Medium*; and therefore those who are *against one Side*, which ever it be, are necessarily *Espousers* of the other. Those who think it *ought not* to be encouraged, will, I hope, think it no Injury to be thought to defend their Opinion upon *such Reasons* as have here been brought for it, till they give *better*. On the other hand, those who think these Reasons inconclusive, and can't find better; will find themselves obliged to confess, that such a Study *ought* to be encouraged; and consequently must take care how they are accessory to such Practices, as in their natural Consequence can't but tend to its Discouragement; Least they come into the Condemnation of those *who love Darknes rather than Light*, and for their
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Punishment, be finally adjudg'd to it. There is in this Case no other Medium between *Encouraging* and *Discouraging*, but what there is between *Light* and *Darkness*. Every Degree of Darkness, is a want of so much Light ; and all want of Light, is a certain Degree of Darkness. To refuse then a greater Degree of Light, where it can be had ; is in truth to prefer Darkness : Which, in my humble Opinion, can never be reasonable or excusable. Those who are of another Mind, plainly *distrust themselves* or *their Cause*. Which if it can *bear the Light*, why should it not be shown in it ? But if it cannot, 'tis not the Cause of God, or of *the Son of God* ; For *God is Light*, and in him is no Darkness ; and the *Son of God* is the *True Light*, which *lighteth every Man that cometh into the World*.

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